

**From:** Chris Lake  
**To:** Microsoft ATR  
**Date:** 1/22/02 3:06pm  
**Subject:** Proposed Microsoft Settlement

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is my public response to the Microsoft settlement. Most of my adult life has been influenced by computers and, specifically, Microsoft operating systems and applications software. I have also used several programs that were specifically targeted by Microsoft in its monopolistic fervor. Two that immediately spring to mind are the following:

- DR-DOS, an operating system from Digital Research, was the installed alternative to MS-DOS and PC-DOS (from IBM) on my first IBM-compatible PC, purchased in 1988

- Netscape Navigator, the commercial successor to the NCSA Mosaic web browser, was my first browser, and the target browser platform of choice during my first few years of web design work (1996-1998)

Until last summer, I was a devoted Windows user, one of the lucky few who had few problems with compatibility, system crashes, or even email viruses. This track record was in direct contrast to other members of my family who are less technically astute than me: their ignorance of virus scanning software and other difficulties in maintaining their systems resulted in many tales of hardship and confusion. At least three fresh reinstallations of Windows have occurred in their household in the past year; I myself found myself reinstalling last summer, after unexplainable system instabilities began affecting my ability to work. I also discovered that the latest generations of the Linux OS had become significantly more user-friendly, and since it is free, I decided to give it a whirl.

Again, I am technically more capable than the average computer user, and thus the transition to Linux was not difficult. I have found ways to do virtually every task that I used to do under Windows. Free software exists to rival, even exceed, the software that I paid thousands of dollars for in my Windows environment. However, there is one very interesting gap in most free software's capabilities: the ability to read and write Microsoft-compatible file formats. This feature gap is a shining example of Microsoft's monopolistic practices: the large percentage of the world uses Microsoft Office and its proprietary file formats, which encourages, if not requires, other businesses and individuals to purchase Office in order to communicate.

Although there are dozens of ways to send a letter electronically, most are unfamiliar to the average typist, and thus the default format, "Microsoft Word .doc" is the ubiquitous, de facto standard. Unless a

competing software package can flawlessly read and write this format, the public at large will be uncomfortable adopting this software, no matter what other wonderful features the program may have. The result is, obviously, a competitive advantage for Microsoft through predatory proprietary controls.

Until and unless Microsoft is required to publish complete specifications of all of its file formats (both existing and in the future) its monopoly will remain uncontested. Open Source software developers can reverse-engineer the Office file formats at significant cost, but never at 100% accuracy. Moreover, Microsoft can change their file formats at a whim, disseminating the patched code for their software to read and write the new formats via automated update procedures or, better yet, through high-priced "upgrade releases," rendering competitors' efforts useless. Most of the world uses public file formats and communications protocols; the Internet itself was built using common, open-source software. The proposed settlement's requirement to publish the Windows API is a good start in this direction, but unless all of Microsoft's file formats and protocols are required to be kept in the public domain, competition, as well as cooperation, will be stifled.

Undoubtedly, Microsoft has improved the computer industry in many ways, but it has also used its success and power to crush competitors, stifle innovation, and infiltrate the Internet with proprietary software. The antitrust decision made clear the abuses Microsoft is guilty of. The penalty phase should not be toothless. Without controls, Microsoft will continue to put its own domination over the best interests of the world, resulting not in competition, but stagnation. Left unchecked, we are condemning the high-tech sector of the entire world economy to the direction of one monopolistic company.

I urge you to consider the future of computing in light of the past behavior of Microsoft Corporation. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

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